

## Testimony on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement of the ICC

Good evening - For the record, my name is Nancy Floreen, Councilmember from Montgomery County. I am presenting testimony regarding the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the InterCounty Connector on behalf of the Montgomery County Council.

We will be sending you our detailed comments later after we receive Council staff analysis, our Planning Board's review, and all the public hearing testimony. As a result, I will offer only general comments tonight.

The first thing this Council did when it took office in December 2002 was to adopt a resolution that strongly endorsed restarting the Environmental Impact Statement process for the ICC. In November of 2004, we reiterated our endorsement with a resolution confirming the Council's historic support for the master plan alignment.

This is why.

The single issue that unites residents in Montgomery County, regardless of age, race, or party affiliation, is frustration with traffic congestion.

In the absence of an Intercounty Connector, local roads have, by default, been turned into regional highways, which is devastating communities and compromising traffic and pedestrian safety.

This county's long term planning objective has always been to balance appropriate land uses with supportive infrastructure. The ICC is a critical component of this goal. Its construction fulfills our master planned promise to residents that government will provide the necessary facilities for their travel needs, and that neighborhood roads will serve local, not regional, purposes.

For the past fifty years, planners have recognized the importance of connecting the eastern and western parts of the county. This need was ultimately integrated into Montgomery County's General Plan.

Since 1975, the County Council has explicitly incorporated the ICC into every single master plan adopted within the Study Area. As a result, in Olney, Fairland, Cloverly, White Oak, Aspen Hill, Glenmont, Gaithersburg and Vicinity, Upper Rock Creek, and Sandy Spring-Ashton, all development which has occurred or has been planned in accordance with the master plans **since 1975** has assumed the existence of the ICC to support transportation needs.

While it is regrettable that the County's master-planned ICC alignment requires it to cross parkland and some sensitive areas, our topography and geography give us no other option for east-west travel. We are a county of stream valleys that radiate out in a north-south fashion from the District of Columbia.

This reality is demonstrated by the construction of the Beltway forty years ago. The critical need for east-west travel in the County required it to cross the Potomac River, Rock Creek, Sligo Creek and Northwest Branch with at least the same, if not a greater, impact on the county's natural environment than the ICC will have. Yet no one can imagine what life would be like without the Beltway today, and I predict our grandchildren will say the same about the ICC.

That is not to say that we are not extremely concerned about the environment. Montgomery County has won a number of national awards for its environmental protection initiatives. To date, we have preserved 47 percent of the county as green space. The October 25 letter from the Chairman of the Planning Board in your DEIS provides further detail on the county's commitment to stewardship of the land. The construction of the ICC is totally consistent with that resolve.

The fact remains that the region expects a 34% increase in population and a 46% increase in jobs. As a result, Montgomery County residents will see a 50% increase in traffic on local roads if we do not get going on the ICC now. Construction of every localized improvement on the books will not begin to achieve the reduction in local traffic that the ICC will produce.

Its projected reduction of daily traffic on Randolph and Norbeck Roads by as much as 6,000 vehicles per day, on Briggs Chaney Road by as much as 7,000 vehicles per day, and on Spencerville Road by as much as 8,000 vehicles per day will make a tremendous improvement in the lives of our residents who live and work in these areas.

We need the ICC. But that is not the end of it. We absolutely agree that more is needed to address our state of gridlock. We need all the road and transit initiatives included in the Consolidated Long Range Plan for Montgomery County, and we need the hiker-biker trail master-planned for the ICC.

In accordance with federal standards, and given Montgomery County's commitment to planning and the protection of communities, to build the ICC in the master planned right of way is the only prudent, feasible and responsible solution to present needs, not to mention the projected demands of the future. This is the only route that is consistent with our fundamental planning principles and fulfills the promises made to our residents for the past thirty years.

Every year this road is delayed only adds to the psychic cost for hundreds of thousands of residents stuck in traffic or threatened by the regional traffic diverted onto local roads. And, of course, every postponement adds millions to the actual cost of construction.

The price to build the ICC is indeed great, but the costs of not building it are greater. This is our single most important road project, and, therefore, we ask you to move it forward on the master plan alignment.

Nancy Floreen is an At-large member of the Montgomery County Council, speaking on behalf of the Council. She is Chair of the County Council's Transportation and Environment Committee and a member of the Council's Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee. Ms. Floreen serves as the Council representative to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and is a former member of the Montgomery County Planning Board.